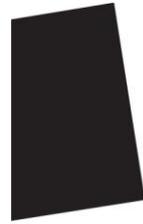


# Kenny Macleod

## Interview

22 May- 10 July 2004



Bloomberg  
**SPACE**

**Opening times**  
Mon - Sat, 11:00 - 18:00

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**Stephen Hepworth:** *Robbie Fraser* (1999) features the same person introducing themselves direct to camera in exactly 100 words eighteen times. These accounts often contradicted what had been said before, but in a gentle and rather humorous way.

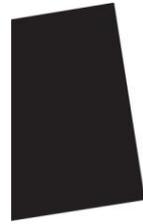
**Kenny Macleod:** I was thinking about the format on television confessional shows. The way that people when presenting a problem would do so in very similar ways, it was almost as if they were acting the part of someone presenting a problem on TV, and I began to wonder about how that related to their everyday life. In conforming to this structure imposed on them by TV do they then start to believe that they are the character they became? The reality of who they were is in danger of becoming lost.

In *Robbie Fraser*, the viewer doesn't get any closer to knowing whom this person is than the pre-existing structure of 100 words allows. So you end up with lots and lots of possibilities and what do you do with them? Do they create an overarching identity that takes into account all the variations presented or do you question how these identities are created? Do you question how you want to create him or how he wants to be created, and why do they want or need to choose?

I wanted to think of it in terms of how we see ourselves, to establish that nothing is fixed at all. We are constantly in this position, recreating who we are, and what we are with regard to a particular situation. The idea that we are at a fixed point, is nonsense. We are always constructing, and the means to do that already exists in the form of language and expectation. All we can do is rearrange the bits.

**SH:** You show this in quite a direct way in *500 Names/Faces* part of *4-video Installation* (2001) which as the title suggests shows 500 names and faces shown and spoken sequentially. The names are spoken alphabetical but in doing so you make mistakes, and they soon don't correspond with the intended faces. I suspect they are not really their names, but I accept them as given, at least to start with. Any questioning of individuals is prevented by the speed at which they appear.

**KM:** I was interested in the sound and visuals as a kind of rhythmic piece. The images were collected from the web and I wanted them to be as neutral as possible while I created the names



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by reconfiguring lists I had found and creating my own by thinking about possible associations from memory, although I altered them to make them sound the way I wanted. The piece was made as part of a group of four. One of the others showed colours, another objects, all were reduced, or united by the rhythms they manifested. .

**SH:** *Blue Video* is an emotional experience that becomes apparent as the graduations of colour appear and they are named, following the names on a decorator's colour chart. These romantic associations are in contrast to the Object List with its stills of everyday items and the continual revolve of colours in a circle in *Fast & Loose*.

**KM:** The experience of the whole thing is more important than focusing on the individual parts. When you are watching one you are aware of the others, it becomes almost musical with the different rhythms. There is also the experience of constant detail with the listing and the images. Focusing on detail it is a way of distancing with what you might be experiencing or doing at any moment. It becomes a rhythmic and aesthetic experience, which pushes back reality.

For Bloomberg SPACE I intend to augment the original work with four additional pieces one of which will use a text from *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, combined with images of bodybuilders' backs and in another an extract from Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* - continuing to use objects, people and text in quite a dehumanised sense, again using them for the rhythm rather than their meaning.

**SH:** When confronted with a multitude we either make choices or accept to immerse ourselves. The rawness of the instant or snap decision is something you reveal. While not quite holding a mirror to ourselves, there is certainly the possibility of the glimpse of self-realisation. Perhaps this shows a greater or more honest truth than a protracted examination, which defuses the intensity and obscures or shrouds truth?

**KM:** *Breaking Up* 2001-02 was an attempt to bring together these two approaches. It consists of a camera shot panning around an empty hotel room on one screen while on the other a flat screen of colour. A series of six spoken narratives describe two different points of view of a relationship between two men who are six rhyming lists of spoken words that accompany the narratives. When shown the two sounds, the voice telling the story and voice listing the words come from two different places. You can't get away from one or the other although you can choose to be closer to one, but the other will always be present.

**SH:** The viewer's experience is always incomplete, having shifted backwards and forwards between the voices. The story is episodic, but doesn't seem to be chronological. The accounts may overlap, and appear to be told from different vantage points.

**KM:** It could be one person living all three experiences or three people each with their own, or two people, one of whom is constant thinking about what is going on, but at the same time is using



rhyming as a means of keeping himself apart. There is also an element of humour in the words - "a bottle of wine" to "Wittgenstein" (the banal to the profound!) Again there is a flattening of significance just as with the men's faces in *500 Names/Faces* but this time using sound. I was interested in making something that could be experienced on a number of different levels. For things to be more open-ended, complex and emotional.

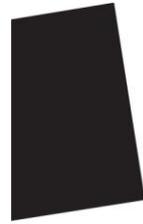
It is really quite dark. The characters are never able to fully communicate with each other because they are always too aware of what is going on. Rather than thinking about just communicating they are always dealing with detail, thinking about what this means in terms of the rest of their lives, the situation now, the hotel room, and their sanity. They are creating a narrative about what is going on rather than experiencing it as what is happening. And of course the room is empty, all that is left is the details  
it is too late, it is after the fact.

In Bret Easton Ellis' novels, there are passages of listings, which crop up when the character starts to dissociate from their actions or experience. Dorian Gray turns life into theatre; when an actress kills herself as a result of his selfish action he interprets it as her achievement of dramatic tragedy rather than acknowledging its squalid actuality and his culpability.

In a concentration camp a person would have been allocated the task of sorting the spectacles of the victims, their life would have become just about that task, deciding which spectacles were bigger than other spectacles, which category would each pair have gone into. The bigger picture of where they were, or where the spectacles were coming from, the moral significance of what they were doing and why would have become lost in the categorisation and the focus on detail. When I visited a concentration camp I was amazed by its rigorous aesthetic; the blocks were laid out on a grid pattern, the lines of wooden bunks and latrines giving an almost musical rhythm; the machines designed to place the bodies in the crematoria had a choreography; the whole was ordered and patterned so as to allow complete dissociation from the sickness of its purpose.

**SH:** Is this how you see the relationship between the businessman and the city in the film you are making to be shown at Bloomberg SPACE?

**KM:** When I think of businessmen and the city, everything seems so positive, strong, masculine and unassailable. I wanted to make a film about someone who is losing the structure of his life. He isn't able to sustain the order that is imposed by the workplace and how this extends into the rest of his life. He's always pushing forward, each day he sets out with an incredible sense of purpose. Despite traveling all day from one place to another this doesn't diminish, but of course he never succeeds in getting anywhere, because there is nowhere to go. The idea of a breakdown of purpose is always something I've been interested in, the stories Robbie Fraser tells always seem positive but hide a deeper emptiness. In this film the main character goes through a process of breaking down, he starts to show characteristics that are not acceptable in polite human



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relationships - being overly rude or making dubious comments. These nasty thoughts go on in most people's heads all the time - he just doesn't try to hide them anymore. It's not that something has gone wrong for this man, it is just that he has given up any attempt to maintain the role expected of him

**SH:** Is the cutting up and remaking the suit a metaphor for that state? Re-clothed he moves out from the society and structures he has known.

**KM:** Essentially it is a kind of reconfiguration, as you say a breakdown of purpose and self-order, however at a certain moment he falls in love, and it becomes for me another attempt to tell a love story. However clumsily he goes about it, at this moment he tries to share his experience of being, to connect with another trying to connect with himself, with his basic needs and wants. It may well go wrong in the end but rather than seeing futility and emptiness as the outcome, I see his determination to connect, to at least give it a try, his energy and anger, as ultimately positive.